DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 423 552 CS 216 524

AUTHOR	Lu, Mei-Yu
TITLE	Multicultural Children's Literature in the Elementary Classroom. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CS-98-06
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	RR93002011
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Indiana University, 2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 150, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Childrens Literature; Classroom Environment; *Elementary Education; *Elementary School Curriculum; *Multicultural Education; *Reading Material Selection; Scholarly Journals
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests; *Multicultural Literature; Web Sites

ABSTRACT

Arguing that schools need to prepare all children to become competent citizens and to create an environment that fosters mutual understanding, this Digest discusses multicultural children's literature in the elementary classroom. It discusses the importance of multicultural children's literature and presents guidelines for selecting multicultural children's literature. The Digest also lists specialized selection sources and review journals, and offers web addresses of selected lists/awards dealing with multicultural children's literature. Contains seven references. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 423 552

Multicultural Children's Literature in the Elementary Classroom

ERIC Digest
EDO-CS-98-06

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS 216 524

ERIC Digest

Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication EDO-CS-98-06

Indiana University
2805 E. 10th St., Suite 150
Bloomington, IN 47408-2698
(812) 855-5847; (800) 759-4723

D133

Multicultural Children's Literature in the Elementary Classroom

by Mei-Yu Lu

When I was a child, the teacher read, "Once upon a time, there were five Chinese brothers and they all looked exactly alike"... Cautiously the pairs of eyes stole a quick glance back. I, the child, looked down to the floor ... The teacher turned the book our way: bilious yellow skin, slanted slit eyes. Not only were the brothers look-alikes, but so were all the other characters!... Quickly again all eyes flashed back at me... I sank into my seat. (Aoki, 1981, p.382)

The vignette above reveals how a minority child felt growing up in the mid 1900s--a time when cultural and linguistic diversity was neither valued in American society nor adequately portrayed in children's literature, an important channel for transmitting societal values and beliefs. The situation, however, has undergone changes in the past twenty years. With the increasing number of linguistic and cultural minorities in the United States, the American society today looks very different than that of Aoki's childhood. These changes in demographic trends impact the education system. Not only do schools need to prepare all children to become competent citizens, but also to create an environment that fosters mutual understanding.

Importance of Multicultural Children's Literature

Jenkins and Austin (1987) suggest that cultural understanding can be reached in many ways, such as by making friends with people from different cultures, and by traveling to other countries. They also emphasize the value of good literature, for it can reflect many aspects of a culture–its values, beliefs, ways of life, and patterns of thinking. A piece of good literature can transcend time, space, and language, and help readers to "learn about an individual or a group of people whose stories take place in a specific historical and physical setting" (p. 6). In addition, exposure to quality multicultural literature also helps children appreciate the idiosyncracies of other ethnic groups, eliminate cultural ethnocentrism, and develop multiple perspectives. Dowd (1992) also argues that

> ... from reading, hearing, and using culturally diverse materials, young people learn that beneath surface differences of color, culture or ethnicity, all people experience universal feelings of love, sadness, self-worth, justice and kindness. (p. 220)

Finally, quality literature about a particular ethnic group benefits cultural and linguistic minority children as well. From reading stories about their own culture, children have opportunities to see how others go through experiences similar to theirs, develop strategies to cope with issues in their life, and identify themselves with their inherited culture. It is, therefore, important that educators incorporate multicultural literature into the curriculum and make it part of children's everyday life. The following sections will provide guidelines and resources for selecting multicultural literature in the elementary classroom.

Guidelines for Selecting Multicultural Children's Literature

The following guidelines for material selection were developed by adopting recommendations from various language arts and multicultural educators: Beilke (1986), Harada (1995), Harris (1991), and Pang, Colvin, Tran, &Yang (1992). They recommend that multicultural literature contain:

1. Positive portrayals of characters with authentic and realistic behaviors, to avoid stereotypes of a particular cultural group.
2. Authentic illustrations to enhance the quality of the text, since illustrations can have a strong impact on children.
3. Pluralistic themes to foster belief in cultural diversity as a national asset as well as to reflect the changing nature of this country's population.
4. Contemporary as well as historical fiction that captures changing trends in the roles played by minority groups in America.
5. High literary quality, including strong plots and well-developed characterization.
6. Historical accuracy when appropriate.
7. Reflections of the cultural values of the characters.
8. Settings in the United States that help readers build an accurate conception of the culturally diverse nature of this country and the legacy of various minority groups.

Mei-Yu Lu is a Reference Specialist at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication and an Associate Instructor at Indiana University.

CS216524

The guidelines above are by no means an exhaustive list. They are meant to provide a starting point from which teachers can explore the many aspects of multicultural children's literature. In addition, teachers may wish to consult with colleagues, parents, and the local ethnic community, drawing upon their specialized knowledge and unique perspectives.

Resources for Material Selection

In addition to the guidelines for material selection, it is also imperative that teachers have access to resources for selecting a collection of materials. A useful resource often contains critical reviews, bibliographic information, and an abstract of each work. It may also provide guidelines for using a particular book, and suggest materials for further reading on issues and trends in multicultural literature. Some of these resources are general, covering a variety of cultural groups, while others may focus on a specific category, such as African-Americans. Used appropriately, they can help teachers locate the materials in a timely and cost-effective manner. In the following section are just a few resources which can aid the collection-building process.

Specialized Selection Sources:

1. Barrera, R. B., Thompson, V. D., & Dressman, M. (Eds.). (1997). Kaleidoscope: A multicultural booklist for grade K-8 (2nd Ed.). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
2. Helbig, A. & Perkins, A. (1994). The land is our land: A guide to multicultural literature for children and young adults. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
3. Miller-Lachmann, L. (1992). Our Family, our Friends, our World : An annotated guide to significant multicultural books for children and teenagers. New Providence, NJ: R. R. Bowker.
4. Muse, D. (1997). The new press guide to multicultural resources for young readers. New York: New Press.

Review Journals:

1. The ALAN Review
2. Book Links
3. Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books
4. Children's Literature in Education
5. Horn Book Guide to Children's and Young Adults' Books
6. Horn Book Magazine
7. Interracial Books for Children Bulletin
8. Kirkus Review
9. MultiCultural Review
10. School Library Journal

Selected Lists/Awards:

1. Notable Children's Trade Books in the Field of Social Studies (http://www.ncss.org/resources/notable/home.html)
2. Carter G. Woodson Book Awards (http://www.soemadison.wisc.edu/ccbc/woodson.htm)
3. The Pura Belpré Award (http://www.ala.org/alsc/belpre.html)
4. America Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature (http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/usawards.html)
5. The Coretta Scott King Award (http://www.ala.org/srrt/csking/index.html)

The information above provides some printed resources that can help teachers to develop their multicultural literature collection. In addition, human resources--librarians in local or school libraries, as well as professors in the field of education and library science--can be valuable resources in the collection-building process. Finally, materials from minority children's household, such as photo albums and books written in their inherited language, are also rich resources.

The United States has been a multicultural society since it was founded, and ethnic and linguistic minorities have contributed significantly to its development. Their contribution should be appreciated, regarded as an integral part of American culture, and authentically represented by the literature collections found in our school libraries and classrooms. Multicultural literature opens a window through which readers may explore the richness of diversity in the American society.

REFERENCES

Aoki, E. M. (1980). "Are you Chinese? Are you Japanese? Or Are you a mixed-up kid?" Using Asian American children's literature. *Reading Teacher, 34* (4), 382-385.[EJ238474]

Beilke, P. (1986). *Selecting materials for and about Hispanic and East Asian children and young people*. Hamden, CT: Library Professional Publications.

Dowd, F. S. (1992). Evaluating children's books portraying Native American and Asian cultures. *Childhood Education, 68* (4), 219-224.[EJ450537]

Harada, V. H. (1995). Issues of ethnicity, authenticity, and quality in Asian-American picture books, 1983-93. *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries, 8* (2), 135-149. [EJ496560]

Harris, V. J. (1991). Multicultural curriculum: African American children's literature. *Young Children, 46* (2), 37-44. [EJ426223]

Jenkins, E. C. & Austin, M. C. (1987). *Literature for children about Asian and Asian Americans*. New York: Greenwood Press.

Pang, V. O., Colvin, C., Tran, M., & Barba, R. H. (1992). Beyond chopsticks and dragons: Selecting Asian-American literature for children. *The Reading Teacher, 46* (3), 216-224. [EJ452692]

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract No RR93002011. Contributors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgement in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official views or opinions of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.